DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 587 CE 069 844

AUTHOR Satterlee, Brian; Craig, Will
TITLE Seven Future Trends in the Workplace.
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Employment Patterns; *Employment Practices; *Futures (of Society); Labor Conditions; Lifelong Learning; Organizational Climate; Productivity; *Quality of Working Life; Self Actualization; Work Environment

ABSTRACT

In the future, seven trends--already firmly established--will become dominant in the world of work. Those trends are as follows: (1) middle management positions will continue to be cut; (2) project teams will be assembled for a single purpose; (3) more women will have executive leadership roles; (4) organizations will continue to increase their use of subcontractors; (5) more workers will telecommute from their homes; (6) lifelong learning will be more important; and (7) strategic advantages will accrue from the acquisition and control of information. Although most of these trends overlap, the one issue that seems to resurface is that everyone is responsible for his or her own outcomes. Individuals must invest in themselves, learn new skills, and develop new relationships. (Contains 11 references.) (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 587

SEVEN FUTURE TRENDS IN THE WORKPLACE

by

Brian Satterlee, Dean
Adult and Continuing Education
Warner Southern College (FL)

and

Will Craig, Executive Producer
Florida Film and Tape

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

November 1994

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B Satterlee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 069 844

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper will be to identify seven future trends in the workplace, and their impact on society. The trends are as follows:

1. Decline of the middle. The reduction of middle management positions.
2. Project Teams. Ad hoc task groups assembled for a single purpose.
3. Women in Leadership. The shattering of the glass ceiling.
4. Subcontracting. Organizations out-sourcing to increase productivity.
5. Telecommuting. Navigating the information highway from the home.
6. Lifelong Learning. Learning as a continual process, not a final result.
7. Knowledge Management. Surviving overload in an age of information

TREND #1: DECLINE OF THE MIDDLE

Tom Peters, in Embracing Chaos, states "Twenty-four out of twenty-five middle managers, who behave like middle managers of the past, are excess baggage and are in serious jeopardy." Today companies are slimming down, cutting the fat out of the middle, and flattening the hierarchy not just to stay competitive, but to stay in business. Technology has increased the speed at which we do business. Organizations encumbered with multiple layers of bureaucracy cannot expedite today's challenges. News headlines tell the story as hundreds of companies restructure their operations to accommodate streamlined business strategies. Middle managers are not the only ones needing to look over their shoulder. Midsize companies not in tune with the current business climate are nearing extinction. Some analysts believe that by the turn of the

century, most of our mid-sized institutions will have vanished, but thousands of tiny companies will be flourishing beneath the feet--and the notice--of the major corporations (Cetron & Davis, 1989).

Fortune 500 companies dominated the economy between 1950 and 1985. The business environment has been so accustomed to being influenced by these giant companies that it is hard to think of it being any other way. However, events of the past decade have changed this paradigm. Of the 120 million people in the workforce today, approximately eight million work for Fortune 500 companies. Seventy-five percent of the remaining workers are employed in companies with less than 200 employees (Peters, 1993). According to Marvin Cetron and Owen Davis in their book, American Renaissance, "This 'bimodal distribution' of institutions is one of the most pervasive trends in the American economy today, and one of the least noticed. In the next dozen years, it will dramatically change the scenery of the business world."

For the middle-manager in a mid-sized company, these changes will create professional crisis. Crisis may sometimes create opportunity. The forward-thinking middle-manager can retrain to become an independent contractor with specialized skills. In many instances the organization which restructured via middle-managerial layoffs will contract with the former employee to implement a specific project.

TREND #2: PROJECT TEAMS

With the collapse of the middle, one might wonder how companies will manage their numerous employees. A new approach to accomplishing tasks is starting to emerge in the development of project teams. A project team is a group of workers gathered together to solve a

particular problem or to accomplish a specific task. They are chosen for their particular expertise in an area that will dovetail with the rest of the team. Project teams can utilize current employees of the firm, as well as resources outside of organizational boundaries. Distributors, vendors, even customers all work together on the project which might last ninety days, six months, or longer depending on the need. After the project is complete, the team disbands. Each member of the team goes on to join another project where their talents are needed (Peters, 1992).

This unique and interesting concept is already working well for several companies. It worked so well for the Ford Taurus that is credited, by some, for turning the American automobile business around. Ford combined the efforts, knowledge, and insights of not only the factory workers who built the cars, but also brought in the parts vendors, the truck drivers who brought the parts to the factory, the paint manufacturers whose product would go on the cars, and subcontractors whose components were vital to the success of the project (subcontractors represent another separate trend and will be discussed later). General Motors has since taken the same Project Team approach with its Saturn line of cars, to the extent of building an entirely new factory around the concept.

Project Teams are not only a diverse group of people, they are managed--and in some cases, not managed at all--with a unique approach. The project leader is most often chosen by the team members and not management. In an eight to ten month project, the leadership of the group might change several times, dependent upon what is important to the project at that time or what phase the project is in. Leading a large number of these project teams will be women.

TREND #3: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

The strategic environment of business has changed, including the demographic profile of work force. The management model that made the U.S. the world's leading economic power in the industrialized post-WWII era is now 40 years old. Work tasks, then, were outer-directed, mechanical, and easier to manage. In the new age of information, work outcomes initiate from a more intrinsic process. The major shift is challenging how organizations go about communicating information. That type of inner-directed work is almost impossible to "supervise" in the traditional sense.

If the male was the prototypical industrial worker, the information worker is typically a female. For the last two decades females have taken two thirds of the millions of new jobs created in the information era. Journals, such as Working Women magazine, provide insight into the impact of females on the new workforce. It's circulation grew from 450,000 in 1981 to 900,000 in 1988, surpassing Fortune, Forbes, and, Business Week. The only business periodical with a larger circulation is the Wall Street Journal (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990).

Women have reached a critical mass in virtually all white-collar professions. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women hold 39.3 percent of the 14.2 million executive, administrative, and management jobs. That's double the number in 1972. In finance more than half of all officers, managers, and professionals in the nation's fifty largest commercial banks are women.

The industrial age may have passed them by, but women are already well established in industries of the future. Cutting-edge industries, like computers, offer numerous opportunities for women. Women are not only leading in high technology firms, they're also starting their own

businesses at twice the rate of men. The Small Business Association reports that 30 percent of small businesses are owned by women. This government statistic, however, only counts sole proprietorships, not partnerships or corporations. The National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) acknowledges that these figures are not only inaccurate, they are three to six years out of date. The NAWBO reports that an additional four to five million women business owners have entered the economy in the last fifteen years.

TREND #4: SUBCONTRACTING

As previously mentioned, middle-manager who lose their jobs due to reorganization may find work in the area of subcontracting. Some may subcontract with their former employer. As the ranks of middle managers decline, opportunities for consultants and independent contractors increase. Companies are using subcontractors in order to be flexible to market conditions, reduce overhead, and to move into strategic business areas in which they have little or no in-house expertise.

Apple Computer, a relatively small company, subcontracts the majority of it's work. Apple maintains key competencies in engineering, design, and final assembly to assure quality and proprietary knowledge. Apple believes it has the ultimately flexible and appropriate organization for the 21st century. The numbers seem to support this premise. The results of an industry study indicate that Apples' sales per employee are $370,000. For IBM, sales per employee equal $139,000. Comparatively, Apples' plant and equipment, as a percentage of sales was 18% versus IBM's at 63%. The restructuring of IBM mentioned earlier was expensive, yet obviously necessary (Peters, 1993).

Subcontracting works in other industries as well. For example, the feature film business works in this manner. A "front office" of producers, accountants, and marketing experts secure the rights to a product (script or treatment). Seventy-five to ninety subcontractors are hired to build the sets, costume the talent, light the scenes, focus the cameras, develop the film stock, and edit the images as outlined in the script. These technicians, actors, and artists gather together for approximately 90-100 days. The results of their efforts is a movie. The film costs anywhere from $2-80 million to produce and the end product is flawless. Actor's flubbed lines end up on the cutting room floor, and less than perfect cinematography doesn't see the darkness of a theater. At the end of the production, the Project Team disperses never to work in exactly the same configuration again. The product is creative, timely, and by any entertainment standard, the best in the world.

TREND #5: TELECOMMUTING

The world community is interconnected via technological advances such as optical fibers, satellite links, and other data connections. It is becoming less important where information originates and where it is processed. People do not need to be physically near one another to work together on information-based products and services.

Computers, facsimiles, and E-mail have made it possible for most everyone to enter opportunities in telecommuting . Electronic bulletin boards, first popularized in 1980, now number over 30,000 different boards worldwide. Electronic forums and video conferencing allow project teams and other groups to meet with little notice and yet have 100 percent participation, regardless of the locations of the members involved.

Cetron & Davis (1989) predict that by the year 2000, fully 22 percent of all employees will be working at home, using information technology. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in 1990, 15 million people already list a home address as their principal place of business. Increasingly, more of these businesses are created by women leaving traditional place-time oriented jobs.jobs.

The benefits of telecommuting are many. Productivity may increase due to fewer interruptions and better concentration provided by the solitude of the home. Another benefit for the worker may be a greater sense of control of their lives, not to mention savings on food, clothing, and transportation. Organizations also benefit. Telecommuters require little in the way of costly office space. Organizations also enjoy greater staffing flexibility because they are not limited geographically in who they can recruit. An unexpected side benefit evolves when an environment is established of individual responsibility, initiative, and accountability. Finally, when organizations act on the principle that employees to are being paid for performance, not merely the time spent on the job, measurable productivity increases occur, as well as overall improvement in operating effectiveness.

TREND #6: LIFELONG LEARNING

The primary challenge of leadership in the 1990's is to encourage the new, better-educated worker to be more entrepreneurial, self-managing, and oriented toward lifelong learning (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990). The Age of Homework is upon us.

Traditional educational methods help us to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, but workers in the Information Age need to learn new dimensions of learning created by technology,

including seeing, hearing, and expressing. An exciting field that is taking advantage of technology is Multimedia Education, which combines printed materials with video, sound, and an interactivity that takes the student on a whole new adventure. The first generation of this new learning environment is Computer-Based Training (CBT).

CBT will become the preferred method of educating the workforce. CBT is a learning experience based on the interaction between a student and a computer. The computer analyzes responses from the student and provides feedback. When the student has mastered the concepts, the program continues. If the student does not have an adequate grasp of the subject matter, the computer moves into a brief review path before moving them on to the next concept. Computer-Assisted Instruction is individualized, enabling employees to work at their own pace. This increases learning and retention, and improves students' attitudes toward computers, the subject matter and the learning process (Allan, 1993).

TREND #7: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Alvin Toffler, in Future Shock (1970) said, "We are creating and using up ideas and images at a faster and faster pace. Knowledge like people, places, things, and organizational forms, is becoming disposable." In the past, communication processes were much simpler. The process consisted of the following components: a sender, a receiver, and a communications channel. Add to that the "information float" --the amount of time information spends in the communication channel-- and you have a fairly comfortable, if not archaic system.

> ...The combined technologies of the telephone, computer and television have merged into an integrated information and communication system that transmits data and permits instantaneous interactions between persons and computers...We have for the first time an economy based on a key resource that is not only renewable, but self-generating. Running out of it is not a problem, but drowning in it is.
>
> John Naisbitt
> Megatrends (1982)

The greatest challenge facing organizations in the coming decade is that of communicating effectively. In the environment of knowledge, the tasks of the worker will be to collect data, filter and organize it into usable information, then to disperse this knowledge. This remolded and slightly more usable knowledge then becomes another person's data to collect, filter, organize, etc. The value of the worker will be measured by how well they are able to transform information into structured knowledge, in their field of expertise (Wurman, 1989).

The field of expertise is an important thing to examine. In this age of information overload, it is impossible to know a lot about a lot of different subjects. Many workers will experience anxiety attacks, the result of attempting to read newspapers in order to keep up with current events; listening to All News radio during their rush-hour commute; arriving to work early to scan through trade journals; answering every phone call, knock on the door, and crisis situation. Richard Saul Wurman (1989) defines information anxiety as the effect, "...produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. Information anxiety is the black hole between data and knowledge. It happens when information doesn't tell us what we need to know." More new information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000 years. There are approximately 9,600 different periodicals

published each year in the United States. About 1,000 books are published every day, and the total of all printed knowledge doubles every eight years (Large, 1984).

Warren Bennis, in Thoughts from a Victim of Info-Overload Anxiety, indicate that the stacks of journals, letters, books, documents, periodicals, memoranda, and newspapers in his office look like "stacks of Dutch colonial homes gently swaying. He says, "I spend a lot of time feeling guilty about the amount of time I spend feeling guilty about reading less than one percent of what I receive."

One of the most anxiety inducing effects of the information era is the feeling that one has to know it all. Realizing one's limitations becomes essential to surviving an information avalanche. One cannot and should not absorb or even pay attention to everything. The key is to determine what is germane to one's life and interests. Time spent collecting information that doesn't pertain to one's success is not only wasted, but the information acquired is probably wasting valuable memory space.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the time between now and the turn of the century will be perhaps the most exhilarating, challenging, and frightening time in human experience. We are faced with more problems and more opportunities than any other society in history. How we choose to perceive these problems/opportunities and how we prepare for them will determine our destiny. The impact of the seven trends on these challenges will be as follows:

1. Large companies are being dissected and their midsection cut out. Layer upon layer of management is systematically being removed. Technology is eliminating the need

for numerous obsolete middle management tasks. Unlike past generations, who climbed the corporate ladder, loyalty to the company is not given a premium value by today's workers. Over the course of a lifetime, a worker is likely to experience nine different jobs and three or four totally different careers. It seems unnatural, but it can be totally liberating. Forget climbing the ladder. In the future, careers are horizontal and much more flexible.

2. Work will be a series of projects. Organizations are increasingly becoming interested in pulling together a unique team of problem-solvers and achievers for very specific, results-oriented projects. Strategic alliances with other companies or "corporate relationships" are alleviating the need to expand plant and operations to develop new products. A new way of doing business is unfolding in front of our very eyes.
3. To be a leader in business today, it is no longer an advantage to have been socialized as a male. Females may hold the advantage in that they don't have to "unlearn" the authoritarian behavior associated with male-dominated hierarchical management systems. Females are leading by example: a democratic yet demanding leadership that respects people and encourages self-management, autonomous teams, and entrepreneurial spirit. Eventually, glass ceilings will shattered in the corporate environment.
4. The largest private sector employer is not General Electric, AT&T or General Motors. The largest private sector employer is Manpower, Inc., a contract and temporary employment agency. They provide skilled employees to companies of all sizes for short and long term projects. Manpower does all the screening, testing, and

payrolling. Companies get a pre-qualified, certified worker who won't cost them a dime in benefits or payroll taxes. Subcontracting for employees is a trend which will only become more popular.

5. The frantic competition in the 1980s to see who could work the longest days and pull down the highest incomes are being replaced with a healthier enjoyment of life and family. We are no longer "living to work" but "working to live." And if you can work and live under the same roof, so much the better. Telecommuting provides the perfect "quality of life" vehicle for balancing business and personal interests. In the coming years, we will find new ways to earn adequate livings without shaping our lives around our jobs.
6. The skills it's going to take to survive, much less succeed, in this next decade, must be learned. One must become computer literate to reach one's goals, whatever they are. Workers who possess skills to adequately navigate their main application will need to learn more. The average computer user applies less than 20 percent of their software's capability.
7. The strategic advantage of the future lies in the acquisition and control of information. Within the next ten years, the amount of raw knowledge available will double.

Most of these trends overlap. One issue that seems to resurface trend after trend is that we are responsible for our own outcomes. This is great news. Start investing in yourself. Learn new skills. Develop new relationships. Build your resume. If you were to put all your skills in your briefcase each morning, make sure that by the end of the day, there are just a few more

tucked in there that weren't there when you started out. And also know that this is a marathon not a sprint.

The message within these seven trends is create your own future. The times have never been more conducive to living your own dream. It's going to mean taking initiative, leaning on self-reliance, and falling flat on your face a few times. The only way to fail, however, is to not take advantage of the opportunities the future offers.

Bibliography

Allan, Kelly. "*Computer Courses Ensure Uniform Training.*" Personal Journal, pp. 65-71, (June 1993).

Bennis, Warren. Thoughts from a Victim of Info-Overload Anxiety. Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Review, 1977.

Cetron, M. & Davies, O. American Renaissance: Our life at the turn of the 21st century. New York: St. Martins Press, 1989.

Fortune 500 score bit profit gains. Orlando Sentinel Section B, p. 6 March 29, 1994.

Large, Peter. The Micro Revolution Revisited. New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Company, 1984.

Naisbitt, John, Megatrends: Ten new directions transforming our lives. New York: Warner Books, 1982.

Naisbitt, J. & Aburdene, P., Megatrends 2000: Ten new directions for the 1990's. New York, William Morrow and Company, 1990.

Peters, Tom. Embracing Chaos: How to shake things up and make things happen. Chicago, IL: Nightingale-Conant, 1993.

Peters, Tom. Liberation Management: Necessary disorganization for the nanosecond nineties. New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1992.

Toffler, Alvin. Future Shock. New York: Random House, 1970.

Wurman, Richard S., Information Anxiety. New York: Doubleday, 1989.